

# Setting of Well-being Objectives – Carmarthenshire County Council

Audit year: 2022-2023

Date issued: July 2023

Document reference: 3703A2023

This document has been prepared as part of work performed in accordance with statutory functions.

In the event of receiving a request for information to which this document may be relevant, attention is drawn to the Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The section 45 code sets out the practice in the handling of requests that is expected of public authorities, including consultation with relevant third parties. In relation to this document, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office are relevant third parties. Any enquiries regarding disclosure or re-use of this document should be sent to Audit Wales at [infoofficer@audit.wales](mailto:infoofficer@audit.wales).

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

# Contents

Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives	4
Carrying out our examination at Carmarthenshire County Council	5
How and when Carmarthenshire County Council set its well-being objectives	5
What we found:	6
The Council has applied the sustainable development principle in the setting of its new well-being objectives but could strengthen its arrangements for citizen involvement and monitoring its progress	6
Recommendations	9
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Key questions and what we looked for	10

## Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a 'well-being duty' on 48 public bodies. The duty requires those bodies to set and publish 'well-being objectives' that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the Act's seven national well-being goals.<sup>1</sup> They must also take all reasonable steps, in exercising their functions, to meet those objectives.
- 2 The Auditor General must carry out examinations to assess the extent to which public bodies have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives.<sup>2</sup> We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 To do something in accordance with the sustainable development principle means acting 'in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. To achieve this, a public body must take account of the five ways of working: long term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention.<sup>4</sup>
- 4 We designed an assessment framework to enable us to assess the extent to which public bodies have applied the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives. **Appendix 1** sets out further information on our approach, including a set of 'positive indicators' that illustrate what good could look like.
- 5 In designing our approach, we considered what we could reasonably expect from public bodies at this point in time. Public bodies should now be familiar with the sustainable development principle and ways of working and be seeking to apply them in a meaningful way. At the same time, we appreciate that public bodies are still developing their experience in applying the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives. Therefore, the examinations include consideration of how public bodies are applying their learning and how they can improve in future.

<sup>1</sup> The seven national well-being goals are; a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

<sup>2</sup> Section 15 (1) (a) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

<sup>3</sup> The Auditor General must carry out examinations over the period set out in the Act, which begins one year before a Senedd election and ends one year and one day before the following Senedd election.

<sup>4</sup> Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

## Carrying out our examination at Carmarthenshire County Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
  - explain how Carmarthenshire County Council (the Council) applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;
  - provide assurance on the extent that the Council applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
  - identify opportunities for the Council to further embed the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives in future.
- 7 We set out to answer the question, ‘to what extent has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives’. We did this by exploring the following questions:
  - Was the process the Council put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
  - Has the Council considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
  - Has the Council put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?
- 8 We discussed the timing of the examination with the Council, and we tailored the delivery to reflect its specific circumstances. We undertook this examination between February 2023 – May 2023.
- 9 We gathered our evidence in the following ways:
  - reviewing key documents;
  - running a workshop with key officers and Members who were involved with setting the well-being objectives; and
  - carrying out a final clarification meeting on outstanding issues with key individuals.
- 10 We also provided some informal feedback to officers on the key findings from our work prior to sharing the report.

## How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 11 The Council approved its new ‘Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 Developing Carmarthenshire Together: One Council, One Vision, One Voice’ (the Corporate Strategy), on the 1 March 2023. The Corporate Strategy is framed around the Council’s new Well-being Objectives (WBOs), these being:

- a. Enabling our children and young people to have the best possible start in life (Start Well)
  - b. Enabling our residents to live and age well (Live & Age Well)
  - c. Enabling our communities and environment to be healthy, safe and prosperous (Prosperous Communities)
  - d. To further modernise and develop as a resilient and efficient Council (Our Council).
- 12 The new Corporate Strategy contains a specific section for its well-being statement, this section and the other content within the Corporate Strategy meet, in part, the requirements for publishing a well-being statement as defined in the Act. One area which needs to be strengthened in future iterations of the Corporate Strategy is the way in which it details how the sustainable development principle has been applied in the setting of its new WBOs.
- 13 The Corporate Strategy has been published on the [Council's website](#).
- 14 In setting its new WBOs the Council has reflected on how it set its previous WBOs and consequently made several changes including:
- reducing the number of WBOs to ensure they were more focused and had greater corporate ownership;
  - developing WBOs that were cross cutting rather than service based, enabling the service specific focus to be addressed through specific service priorities; and
  - making the Corporate Strategy simpler and more accessible to citizens and stakeholders.

## What we found

**The Council has applied the sustainable development principle in the setting of its new well-being objectives but could strengthen its arrangements for citizen involvement and monitoring its progress**

### The process for setting well-being objectives

#### Evidence Base

- 15 The Council's Corporate Strategy has drawn evidence from a wide range of sources, including the:
- Cabinet's Vision Statement;
  - Annual Report and Self-Assessment of 2021-22;

- Annual Governance Statement;
- Residents' Survey undertaken in 2022; and
- Public Services Board's well-being assessment and resultant Plan.

These evidence sources have been used to help shape the WBOs and to provide a clear rationale for why the Council has focused on the areas within the new WBOs.

- 16 Whilst the Council has made good use of data and has undertaken some horizon scanning in developing its WBOs, it intends to undertake further work in this area to support its long-term decision making.
- 17 One of the building blocks for the development of its WBOs has been the Cabinet's Vision Statement. This Vision Statement includes a focus on future risks and current needs such as, climate change and the poverty/hardship crisis and these key cross cutting areas are now included in the Council's WBOs.
- 18 An important part of the evidence base for the setting of the Council's WBOs was the intelligence and information drawn from the Public Services Board (PSB) Well-Being Assessment. This assessment considered an extensive range of data and intelligence from a wide range of sources and was undertaken on a regional basis. This has also enabled the identification of regional risks and issues that have influenced the new WBOs and the steps that will be taken to deliver them.

## Consultation and involvement

- 19 The Council has used several existing engagement activities with citizens, businesses, staff and wider stakeholders to build an understanding of the key issues that citizens would like the Council to address, and this evidence has been used to shape its new WBOs. However, the Council recognises that it could have done more to ensure that those from typically under-represented groups were better engaged in these existing engagement exercises. The Council has therefore established a programme of work to address this issue. We understand that this work will also include the development of a base line for engagement data which is intended to support future trend analysis and in assessing what progress is being made towards achieving its WBOs.
- 20 Whilst the Corporate Strategy refers to involving citizens in the delivery of the WBOs, the Corporate Strategy does not provide any more specific detail on this. It will be important that the Council takes the opportunity to define how and when it will involve citizens in the delivery of its WBOs as part of its Divisional/Thematic/Service Delivery Plans.

## Planning to improve well-being

- 21 Whilst the Corporate Strategy has considered how the WBOs support the national goals this is at a very high level. Ordinarily the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) would include a clearer narrative describing how a strategy or decision supports the national goals. However, the Council did not complete an IIA

for the Corporate Strategy and therefore the opportunity to more clearly consider how the WBOs support the delivery of the national goals has been missed.

- 22 The new WBOs have been structured to reflect the need to have a broad impact. The Council has introduced thematic priorities (eg climate change and poverty) which are designed to bring a whole Council approach, to achieve greater impact and potentially outcomes that deliver multiple benefits.
- 23 There is good alignment between the Council's and PSB's WBOs which should support the delivery of well-being for the people and area of Carmarthenshire. However, consideration of other public bodies' well-being objectives and priorities in the setting of the Council's WBOs would help to further strengthen its arrangements.
- 24 The Council has made a clear commitment in its Corporate Strategy to work with others on delivery of its new WBOs. There are some positive examples of collaborative working which support the delivery of its WBOs, such as those around the poverty agenda and carbon reduction. However, the role of partners in helping to deliver its WBOs was not clearly defined for all the WBOs. Therefore, it will be important that as Divisional/Thematic/Service Delivery Plans are developed, these clearly articulate how and where partners will be key to the delivery of the Council's WBOs and priorities.

## **Delivering the well-being objectives**

- 25 The primary process for delivering the WBOs and steps will be through the Council's Divisional/Thematic/Service Delivery Plans. It will be important that the current work to develop these plans ensures that they set out a clear set of actions that, when added together, will make sufficient progress on delivering the WBOs.
- 26 The Council's budget for 2023-24 and its medium-term financial plan were set prior to the adoption of its new WBOs. In its future budget setting the Council will need to ensure that there is a clear alignment between its financial planning and its new WBOs.
- 27 The Council has reported that its future financial position remains challenging, with significant savings targets required for 2023-24 and the next three years. Therefore, it will be important to ensure that its medium-term planning assumptions also consider the impact that any required savings will have on delivering its WBOs and/or where there is known future financial risk to delivering its WBOs.

## **Monitoring the well-being objectives**

- 28 The Council's annual self-assessment report 2021-22 provides a clear and balanced assessment of progress against its prior WBOs and identifies where action is still required. This annual self-assessment report is drawn from the routine monitoring of WBOs through the Council's Quarterly Performance Observation and Monitoring meetings. This approach captures performance and contextual data



from a wide range of sources and provides a good mechanism for officers and Members to regularly scrutinise and assess progress on delivering WBOs.

- 29 Whilst the Council's monitoring of WBOs has significantly improved over the last few years, it will be important that this momentum is maintained and that its new Divisional/Thematic/Service Delivery Plans and the resultant quarterly monitoring reports continue to provide an effective framework for assessing progress on the WBOs.
- 30 Whilst the Corporate Strategy contains examples of the outcomes the Council is hoping to achieve through delivering on its WBOs, the Corporate Strategy itself does not include any specific measures. However, the Corporate Strategy confirms that, 'the specific actions and measures for how it will make progress against its Corporate Strategy and well-being objectives will be outlined within detailed delivery plans for the thematic and service priorities'. It will be important that the Council quickly identifies an appropriate set of measures to monitor its progress. The work the Council is proposing to undertake on refining its measures and metrics as part of the development of its corporate data suite should ensure that there is better data/intelligence to enable the Council to continue to improve the monitoring of progress on its WBOs.

## Recommendations

- R1 The Council should build on the progress it has made in applying the sustainable development principle in the setting and delivery of its well-being objectives by:
- a) ensuring that it is able to draw on the views of the full diversity of the population in setting its future well-being objectives;
  - b) providing a clearer description in future iterations of its WBOs/Corporate Strategy of how the Council has applied the sustainable development principle in the setting of its WBOs and how its WBOs support the delivery of the national goals;
  - c) maintaining the positive momentum around its monitoring and reporting by ensuring that its Divisional/Thematic/Service Delivery Plans identify appropriate actions and measures that continue to provide an effective framework for assessing progress on the delivery of its WBOs; and
  - d) ensuring that in future budget setting or refresh of its medium-term financial plan there is clear alignment with the Council's new WBOs, and that there is clarity about how savings targets or known future financial uncertainty might affect the delivery of its WBOs.

# Appendix 1

## Key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this examination, along with some sub-questions to guide our evidence gathering. It also includes some 'positive indicators' that have been tailored to this examination, adapted from those we have previously used to inform our sustainable development principle examinations. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

<b>To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?</b>	
<b>Planning: Was the process the body put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?</b>	
	<b>Positive indicators</b>

**To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?**

<p><b>Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the body’s understanding of the ‘as is’/ short-term need.</li> <li>• The body has set well-being objectives based on a good understanding of current and future need, risk and opportunities, including analysis of future trends. This is likely to be drawn from a range of local and national sources, such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Public Services Boards’ well-being assessments</li> <li>– Regional Partnership Boards’ population assessments</li> <li>– The results of local involvement/ consultation exercises</li> <li>– Service monitoring and complaints</li> <li>– Future Trends report</li> <li>– Natural Resources Wales’ State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The body has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body uses the results of involvement to help select its well-being objectives. That involvement – whether primary, secondary or a combination – reflects the full diversity of the population.</li> <li>• Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner.</li> </ul>

**To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?**

**Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?**

- The well-being objectives have been designed to improve well-being in the broadest sense and make a contribution across the seven national well-being goals.
- The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work.
- There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives impact on/ relate to what other public bodies are trying to achieve and opportunities to work together.

**Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?**

- The body has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation.
- The objectives are designed to meet short and longer-term need. Where objectives are set over a short to medium timeframe, they are set in the context of longer-term considerations or ambitions.

**Resourcing and delivery: Has the body considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?**

**Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?**

- Resources have been allocated to ensure the objectives can be delivered over the short and medium-term, but the body has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives.

**To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The body has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.</li></ul>
<b>Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The body is drawing on its knowledge of partners objectives/activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.</li></ul>
<b>Monitor and review: Has the body put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?</b>	
<b>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, e.g., by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/ organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term.</li><li>• There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the body to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.</li></ul>
<b>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The body shows self-awareness and a commitment to improving how it applies the sustainable development principle so that it can do so in a meaningful and impactful way.</li></ul>

## To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

### development principle to setting its well-being objectives?

- The body has learnt from setting previous well-being objectives and from applying the sustainable development principle more generally and has improved the process for setting its new well-being objectives.
- The body has or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in this round of setting well-being objectives.





Audit Wales

1 Capital Quarter  
Cardiff CF10 4BZ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://www.audit.wales)

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.  
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.